

Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on Statements Made by Ambassador Zalman Shoval of Israel February 15, 1991

Public statements made yesterday by Israeli Ambassador Zalman Shoval criticizing the United States are outrageous and outside the bounds of acceptable behavior by the ambassador of any friendly country. The Secretary of State made this clear to the Ambassador yesterday, and the President protested to Prime Minister Shamir by cable this morning.

We deserve better from Israel's Ambassador.

Note: The statement referred to Secretary of State James A. Baker III and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir of Israel. The Ambassador had criticized the United States for withholding economic assistance to Israel.

Exchange With Reporters in Kennebunkport, Maine February 17, 1991

The President. Let me say this, that this was an invigorating walk, and it really is good. It makes me think of the—two points out here, unrelated to foreign affairs—fitness, and our country is fit, getting better. And I'm proud of the job that Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Physical Fitness Council are doing—very, very important, actually. And conservation. I looked at these beaches today. We've had some rough storms up here, about a month ago, a big storm. And yet the beaches, I think, just on this quick look are relatively clean. And I think it shows that the American people are aware that recreation and conservation are very important.

So, that's what I learned today as I cleared my mind from concerns that all Americans have halfway around the world for this hour. Now I'll go back and do what I started off doing—stay in touch with our key people and General Scowcroft, who is minding the store down there, Baker, Cheney, General Powell. And I can say having talked, checked in this morning, I think things are going well. I will repeat, they're on schedule, and we are determined to finish this job and do it right, fulfill what I've said are our objectives, with no concession, no pulling back.

The American people are strongly in support not only of the troops but of these

objectives. And, of course, that is a very important point because it is my hope that when this is over we will have kicked, for once and for all, the so-called Vietnam syndrome. And the country's pulling together, unlike any time—in this kind of situation—any time since World War II. And that's a good thing for our country. And that sends a strong signal for the future that we're credible, we're committed to peace, we're committed to justice, and we are determined to fulfill our obligations in trying to bring about a more peaceful world order.

That's what I've been thinking about today.

Persian Gulf Conflict

Q. What, if anything, do you expect to come out of the meetings in Moscow tomorrow?

The President. Well, I don't know. But as I said yesterday, I think President Gorbachev, who's been in touch with me about this, is trying very hard to seek an end to this conflict. But he knows very well that the objectives spelled out by the United Nations—the Soviet Union was an important part of this—must be met in their entirety. And that was reiterated by the Soviet spokesman yesterday, and that's a good thing.

So, as I told you all yesterday when there

was some question mark about how the Soviet role was viewed, that I think it's a constructive role. I think they're trying very hard, and they're trying within the mandate of the United Nations resolutions. And that's the key point.

Q. Is that constructive in the sense that you expect them simply to reinforce what you've been saying all along, that the U.N. has been saying all along?

The President. Well, who knows? I mean, the only good news out of the statement that raised people's hopes and then dashed them—the statement out of Baghdad—the only good news out of that was, for the first time, they talked about withdrawal, and they did not reassert their position that Kuwait was Province 19. And that's positive. They should have done it on about the first week in August, and they should have got out.

Because I am concerned about the suffering of innocents, and I'm talking about the innocents in Kuwait, too. Last week they had a bad week there according to the Amir, to whom I talked before I left for Maine. And he told me that his estimate was some 200 young people, 15 to 20, boys and girls, their bodies mutilated and all of them killed. So, we mourn for the innocents. And I've been mourning for the innocents in Kuwait since that invasion in August. And I hope we can get an end to that suffering very, very soon. I think we will.

Q. Let me ask you about—the French Foreign Minister says that a date has been set for the start of the ground war and that we're on the eve of the pre-eve. Do you disagree with what he says?

The President. I don't comment on anything to do with military. I've referred to those comments—although the decision on ground forces will be made by me for U.N. forces. But I would simply not comment on that. It reminds me of "Saturday Night Live." Remember the questions they ask

on "Saturday Night": "Hey, tell us how we can help the Iraqi soldiers the most," or "What is the password?" or "Please give me some information that will do in our troops." I mean, I'm not in that business—come on. That was a wonderful piece.

Q. Do you consider it unhelpful, is it unhelpful to have other coalition members doing that?

The President. No. The coalition is strong. I talked to President Mitterrand, I think it was yesterday morning, and the French have played a major leadership role in the coalition. And they're just as solid as granite. And they're strong. And President Mitterrand has my full respect. And the French have their money where their mouth is, too. They're over there where their kids are flying. They've got troops there. And they're tough, and they're strong. And they are solid in seeing that Saddam Hussein now do that which he should have done long ago: get out of Kuwait.

President Saddam Hussein of Iraq

Q. Is it a goal to topple Saddam?

The President. The goals have been spelled out by me and by the coalition partners, and the goals remain the same. But I would answer like the Prime Minister: I wouldn't weep if they put him aside.

Note: The exchange began at approximately 11 a.m. on the beach in front of the President's home. In his remarks, President Bush referred to Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs; Secretary of State James A. Baker III; Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney; Colin L. Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Amir Jabir al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah of Kuwait; Foreign Minister Roland Dumas and President Francois Mitterrand of France; and Prime Minister John Major of the United Kingdom. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.